IN/VISIBILITY

Queer*(ing)* Photography

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Master of Arts thesis abstract

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Abstract

This Master's thesis is based on artistic research in the field of photography. My main questions are: what is queer photography and how to queer photography. I have selected four strategies – failure/abstraction, haptic visuality, corner, and agency – to explore the possibilities of queer(ing) photography. I use these strategies in my artistic practice. The aim is to create images that simultaneously queer the photographic practice and are queer in content. The thesis also includes a feminist research manifesto that I use as a tool for self-reflection.

I discuss the central term 'queer' and the definitions of 'queer art' and 'queering art'. I argue that the term 'queer' cannot be separated from either queer identities nor it's norm-defying qualities. I later utilize these definitions with my chosen queer tactics. Each tactic further explores the possibilities and variations of queer art through artistic practice. The key theories that I focus on are queer failure by J. Halberstam, queer abstraction by D. Getsy, and haptic visuality by L.U. Marks. In addition to these, I discuss minority/queer (self-)representation in portrait photography.

All of my methods somehow address the politics of visibility, each from a slightly different angle. I discuss the need and dangers of exposure, concentrating mainly on the questions of transgender/non-binary representation.

The thesis consists of this theoretical written part and an artistic part of 17 photographs and an exhibition plan. I publish the artistic part under the pseudonym Jussi Lautu.

Keywords queer art, queering art, haptic visuality, failure, gender non-binary, transgender, queer abstraction, photography

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Tiivistelmä

Tämä maisterin opinnäytetyö perustuu taiteelliseen tutkimukseen valokuvaukseen keskittyen. Pääkysymykseni ovat: mitä on queer valokuva ja miten queerittää valokuvausta. Olen valinnut neljä strategiaa - epäonnistuminen/abstraktio, haptinen visuaalisuus, nurkka ja toimijuus - tutkiakseni queerin valokuvan sekä valokuvan queerittämisen mahdollisuuksia. Käytän näitä strategioita taiteellisessa työskentelyssäni. Tavoitteena on luoda kuvia, jotka samanaikaisesti queerittävät valokuvauskäytäntöjä ja ovat sisällöltään queerejä. Opinnäytetyö sisältää myös feministisen tutkimusmanifestin, jota käytän itsereflektion apuna.

Keskustelen keskeisestä termistä ‘queer’ sekä queer-taiteen ja taiteen queerittämisen määritelmistä. Väitän, että termiä ‘queer’ ei voi erottaa queereistä identiteeteistä eikä myöskään sen normeja vastustavasta luonteesta. Hyödynnän näitä määritelmiä valitsemissani queereissä / queerittävissä taktiikoissa. Jokainen taktiikka tutkii edelleen queerin taiteen mahdollisuuksia ja muunnelmia taiteellisen työskentelyn kautta. Keskeisiä teorioita tässä tutkimuksessa ovat J. Halberstamin queer epäonnistuminen, D. Getsyn queer abstraktio sekä L.U. Marksin haptinen visuaalisuus. Näiden lisäksi keskustelen vähemmistöjen / queer-ihmisten itsemääräämisoikeudesta muotokuvauksessa.

Kaikki käyttämäni menetelmät käsittelevät jollain tapaa näkyvyyden politiikkaa, kukin hieman eri näkökulmasta. Keskustelen moninaisten representaatioiden tarpeellisuudesta sekä vaaroista keskittyen lähinnä trans- / muunsukupuolisia koskeviin kysymyksiin.

Opinnäytetyö koostuu tästä teoreettisesta kirjallisesta osasta ja taiteellisesta osasta joka sisältää 17 valokuvan sarjan sekä näyttelysuunnitelman. Julkaisen taiteellisen osan pseudonyymillä Jussi Lautu.

Avainsanat queer taide, taiteen queerittäminen, haptinen visuaalisuus, epäonnistuminen, muunsukupuolisuus, transsukupuolisuus, valokuva, queer abstraktio

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INTRODUCTION

On March 5th, 2020, I attended S. Stryker's lecture *On Groundlessness: Transphobic Feminism, Gender Ideology, Transfeminist Critique* at my second home university, the University of Helsinki. Stryker, who is an established scholar, author and filmmaker, discussed the increasing discrimination against transgender people. The sizable lecture room was packed. Many of us felt like the person next to me said, like teenage girls in a boy band concert (if you allow such gendered metaphor). The audience felt united, and Stryker spoke to us each individually. They were encouraging gender rebellion.

In that room, I understood why I was writing this thesis. Why the subject mattered. I had never felt this kind of unity during my photography/art studies. There was no sense of urgency (and no boy band concert equivalents). Was there even passion? I am not sure, to be honest. The matters discussed in these studies were interesting, but they never seemed pressing. The politics of photography/art often seemed like an inconvenience to many of my fellow photographers/artists. It was a subject that was often preferably not discussed. Recognizing one's privileged position and succeeding responsibilities (as a photographer/artist) appeared to be challenging to many. In these surroundings, it can be easy to forget that photography is political.

I often felt that the issues I wanted to touch with photography were deemed 'too' complicated. I was not able to explain myself and was confused, whether I was obliged to do so. I felt the pressure to simplify my ideas or to make them less queer. On many occasions, I was expected to explain queer issues to a (mostly) straight community. I am sure I would

have faced fewer questions if I had just labelled my work as a personal project, not a political one. Even though, personal is, of course, also political. What I mean by this is that the private experience can be more easily reduced to signify a single incident. It is an interesting but not a pressing matter. In part, I am writing this thesis as my final explanation on queer for this community of fellow students and teachers. I am writing this so that I am more prepared to express my position in the future. (However, I do not quite know whether or not I even need to make sense and to whom.)

Because the primary audience of this thesis is other photographers, I open up my work process extensively. I analyze why, I believe, even the tiny details of image-making are political. I work between two disciplines: gender studies and photography/art. This is my attempt to figure out how to combine these two. Gender studies is characterized by a sense of urgency because the whole field is built on activism. It is political to its core. The aim of feminist research is to have an impact on the world. Art photography is more elusive. Art makes an impact on the world, but it is difficult to show how it is done. I guess my aim is to find this urgency in art and to figure out how to communicate the urgency I feel through artistic practices. I want to see if it can be done with the elusive means of art.

In the thesis, I discuss mostly contemporary queer art theories. I focus on scholars and artists that refer to queer art/issues directly. I deliberately leave out *most* of the canon of photography theory. Also, many central queer theorists are left out, and I rely mostly on discussions/definitions on queer within the arts. I have made this decision due to the limited scope of a Master's thesis and to narrow down the theoretical basis of this work. (If I were to do further research on this topic, a more comprehensive theoretical grounding would be in place.) This way, I am also placing this Master's thesis aside from the mainstream into the (artistic) queer stream.

I am located in Finland. My perspective is Western/North European and could not be anything else. The premise of this thesis is based on the image of the world and queerness painted by the English language. My research questions could not exist without it. The interpretations of queer(ing) art outside this (Western) frame might be significantly different.

My main questions are: what is queer photography and how to queer photography. I have selected four strategies – failure/abstraction, haptic visuality, corner, and agency – to explore the possibilities of queer(ing) photography. I use these strategies to create photographic works. The aim is to make images that simultaneously queer photography/photographic practices and are queer (in content). In other words, each of these strategies includes both an aspect of queer photography and an aim to queer photography.

This written part of the thesis consists of four chapters and a poem. I move from the abstract towards the figurative. All of my methods eventually come down to the politics of visibility, each from a slightly different angle. Photography being the medium of showing and/by capturing, this is hardly surprising.

I begin with a feminist research manifesto that is my guideline during the process. It is a tool for self-reflection (see appendix A). It serves as a reminder of the principles followed in gender studies(/feminist research) making this feminist artistic research (or is it queer artistic research?). In the first chapter, I discuss the central term 'queer'. What are the limits of queer art/photography and what I mean by queering art/photography? I also introduce my method of working and clarify why I use the male pseudonym Jussi Lautu.

The second chapter concentrates on queer failure and abstraction. Based on the theories of J. Halberstam and D. Getsy, I write about the possibility of embracing failure and abstraction in queer art. They both can be forms of resistance. The images I photographed in Google Street View contain glitches and metamorphoses. I use unorthodox image-making methods to queer photography and argue that failures can make the pictures queer.

Corner is the poem

In the fourth section, I focus on haptic visuality, a term introduced by film theorist L.U. Marks. It discusses the haptic elements in audiovisual/photographic material. How can an image speak to our sense of touch, smell, or taste? Marks argues that when an image appeals

to our non-audiovisual senses, it penetrates us. The incomplete images demand activity from the spectator who can no longer remain a distant observer. I discuss this theory, the political power of ambiguous/obscure representations, and the different ways images can puncture the viewer.

The last chapter is about having agency in one's own representation. Contrary to the previous chapters, it defends visibility (of queer/minority people). I develop a collaborative photographic practice where the non-binary models take self-portraits in the studio. This is an attempt to dismantle the power imbalance between the model and the photographer. The series participates in the discussions on transgender people's right to self-determination. What are the benefits and dangers of using photography and visibility as tools in the struggle for equal human rights and recognition (for transgender people/minorities)?

This thesis consists of this written part, a series of 17 photographs, and an exhibition plan. I publish the artistic part under the pseudonym Jussi Lautu.

I AM TRANSPARENT – A Feminist Research Ethics Manifesto

My aim is to be **open and transparent** about my decisions, motivations, and failures.

> The more transparent I am with my methods, the more visible I become as a researcher/artist in the text.

I use as **gender-neutral language**[1] as possible. This means,
- no gender-specific pronouns
- initials instead of full first names
- careful use of adjectives considered masculine or feminine

I try to be aware of my **position and privileges**.

I try to find ways to make **intersectional[2] and inclusive research.**

I understand that the thesis is not something I do only for myself but that it is active. When someone reads it, the text does things. It has an effect. The artworks interact with their surroundings.

The process of creating does not happen in solitude.
- I consider **the impact of research** beyond personal development.

I pay attention to the **accessibility** of the work.
- being mindful of difficult terminology and complicated language (No academic jargon!)
- layout choices such as typography, font size, etc.

I take care of my own **well-being** and try to be considerate towards the people involved in the process.

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1 Because the norm is still male, gender neutrality in language may end up being masculinist. It may work against its purpose and actually make everyone appear male. This is why someone else might rather emphasize the gender of the authors to bring forth female and gender-variant authors. I am also aware that for many transgender people it is important that they are addressed with their chosen gender-specific pronoun.

2 Acknowledging that a person has multiple different positions, like gender, race, class, age, ability, etc, that intersect. Their experiences, for example, of oppression is informed by these intersecting positions.

1 . ON QUEER(ING)

> "Even to define queer, we now think, is to limit its potential, its magical power to usher in a new age of sexual radicalism and fluid gender possibilities." (Halperin, 2003, p. 339)

Queer is a reject, and it rejects definitions. The term is ever-changing and slippery. This has become painfully apparent during this thesis process. All I can do is to chase its contemporary meanings but never capture them in their entirety. This chapter is my (pompous) attempt to offer an overview of what the term 'queer' stands for. I provide some outlines on what *queer* art or *queering* art means in this work. I also introduce my methodology that further examines different aspects of queer(ing) art/photography.

Before discussing art, a few words about the reject alone, the term 'queer'. There are three entwined aspects of queer that I consider the most essential. Firstly, queer is something unnatural, weird, incorrect, or abnormal. To nominate something as 'queer' is to say that it is outside the norm. Secondly, the people that are queer or queer-identified. I (am cutting many corners here and) use 'queer' as an umbrella term for all LGBTQIA[1] people because they all fall outside the normative categories of sexuality and/or gender[2]. The third aspect is the active quality of 'to queer' something. Queer people are considered queer because they are non-normative and thus queer the norm. (see, e.g. Pilcher, 2017, pp. 11–14; Getsy, 2016, pp.12–21)

1 Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual

2 In its even more extensive and intersectional meaning, queer can mean anyone who is defying the norms in one way or another. We are all a little queer in some respect or another.

The contemporary use of the term 'queer' should, in my opinion, include all these aspects. It cannot be separated from queer identities, but it should not be solely a synonym for them either. What I mean by this is that the term 'queer' was used as a discriminatory word against the LGB[3] community and was later adopted as a political move. Being a queer is thus political. It is "a self-chosen political and personal stance deriving from a critical suspicion of normativity and of assimilations into it." (Getsy, 2019, p. 65) To use queer to describe something outside this context just to label something as weird or controversial erases this political aspect of minorities fighting for their rights. If, on the other hand, the term is used only as an identity label, it hides the active norm-defying substance of it.

Queer is always something that is actively outside the norm. It is an active stance that is constantly moving away from the normative, simultaneously pointing and revealing the norms. The norm is ever-changing, and so is the abnormal, the queer. It can never have a definitive definition. It changes with the times. "For instance, an action, a mood, a love, a desire that was queer a century ago might not be so today, and vice versa. Something queer in one place is unremarkable in another." (Getsy, 2019, p. 65) This fluctuating property of the term 'queer' means that my interpretations are strictly tied to this particular time and place. I can already sense a change that is coming. But I try to stay with the queer in the now.

My specific interest is what makes art/photography queer? What does it mean to queer art/photography? In this thesis, I discuss how this slippery concept of queer operates with art/photography. These terms are used increasingly in the field. Many museums and galleries offer guided queer tours to their exhibitions. My pile of exhibition catalogues and anthologies of queer art is growing. Online articles regularly exhibit series of queer art/photography. The term is used, I think, rather frivolously at times. (Admittedly, I have done it too.) I am afraid it has become too trendy, and that has diminished the political qualities and potential of the term[4].

I am not able to restore (or harness all) the magic qualities of queer,

3 Originally queer referred to lesbian, gay and bisexual people, but nowadays it often refers to all LGBTQIA people. These definitions are still constantly debated and not all LGBTQIA individuals themselves identify as queer.

4 see also Goldberg, 2016

but I join the conversation. (Another trendy ‘queer’ series/thesis coming up!) I discuss some of the pitfalls of this superficial use of the terms. Actually, one of the first incidents that sparked the idea for this thesis was when I was asked, “Isn’t all contemporary art queer?” I knew that it is not, but I was not able to argue my stance at that time. This is my attempt to do it now.

Before I go into the specifics of my artistic work and my strategies of/to queer art/photography, I discuss the concepts of ‘queer art’ and ‘queering art’ in more detail. This division of ‘queer’ and ‘queering’ (that is never clear-cut) was the starting point to my artistic approach and therefore necessary. It also gives a more in-depth look into the murky meanings of the term ‘queer’.

1.1 QUEER ART

Definition of *queer*

a: differing in some way from what is usual or normal: odd, strange, weird
b: eccentric, unconventional

Definition of *queer* (noun)

sometimes disparaging + offensive: a queer person: such as
a: a person who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or otherwise not heterosexual ...
b: a person whose gender identity is nonbinary or differs from the sex they had or were identified as having at birth: a genderqueer or transgender person[5]: a person who is not cisgender[6]

(Merriam-Webster dictionary)

What does it mean to define art as queer? Should queer art be non-normative, concerning queer people and actively queering? In this chapter, my main focus is on queer art's relation to queer people/identity. I discuss the role of the (queer) artist and the (queer) subject matter in queer art. I also briefly reflect on what it means when 'queer' is used to talk about the non-normativity of art.

Often, when something is labelled as queer art, it seems to hint that **the artist is queer,** a member of the LGBTQIA community that is. Many anthologies and exhibitions of queer art are more or less based on this classification[7]. This is by far the most common qualification of queer art I have encountered. It might also be the central denominator, and I will

5 Individual identifications are more complex than this. For example, not all gender non-conforming people identify as queer, not all nonbinary people feel comfortable with the term genderqueer and so on. For some 'queer' is still a derogatory term. Always respect individual identifications. Ask, don't assume.

6 A person whose gender identity matches their assigned gender at birth

7 e.g. *Queer British Art 1861-1967* at Tate Britain in 2017 & *And What? Queer. Arts. Festival* since 2016

later discuss why. Still, the artist's identity can not be the single criteria for queer art. 'Queer' is ambiguous, and so is queer art. Concentrating on identities only leads to further dilemmas.

Using the artists' identity as the measure of the queerness of their art implies that (queer) artists make art that always reflects their(/our) (queer) identity. There is a danger of essentializing when you mix artists' identities with their art. Not all art made by queer artists is queer art. There simply are no properties that all queer artists share. There are no aspects of their(/our) identity that magically flow into everything they(/we) do. Similarly, there are no feminine properties that every single female artist has that refines their art. Nevertheless, these kinds of generalizations are often done.

Maybe this problem is best demonstrated with the majority/norm of a white straight, cisgender male artist. How often do you see group exhibitions, art books, or articles with titles like, *"Male art", "Man photographers you should know", "Heterosexual art in the middle ages", "White artists"*, or *"20 most important male artists of 2020"*? Never. These sound ridiculous because we are so used to having the white straight, cisgender man as the norm of everything, including the art world. They are the free agents that have only individual qualities, not male qualities. They do not have "collective" qualities that derive from their gender or sexuality. They are individuals. Thus their art reflects only their individual creativity.

Other than white straight, cisgender male artists are often named according to their identity to distinguish them from the norm. This is usually a critical strategy of visibility. The minority that would otherwise stay hidden is given the spotlight. Unfortunately, this spotlight still keeps them(/us) in the margins as the other, different from the "normal" artist. This double action happens every time artists, and their artworks are classified by the artist's properties/identity. 'Female art', 'crip art', 'outsider art' or 'queer art' are such examples. (In a way, I am also participating in this tricky business.) This happens as long as the norm of the white straight cisgender male artist is not made equally visible by naming them as what they are.

When all art made by a queer artist is labelled queer art, it hides the

fact that there are other themes in their(/our) art. Queer artists are much more than their queer identity. H. Ginsberg talks about this dilemma.

> "It was really important for me as a trans artist, and especially someone who works a lot with their body, to make work that wasn't specifically about being trans and demand that my work be viewed that way. So often it feels like the things we make are only allowed to be about our trans-ness, and more often than not about that as a struggle, and it feels so reductive." (Philomène, 2019a)

Knowing the artist's (queer) identity is thus not enough to qualify queer art. We need to look at the subject matter and the intent of the artist as well.

Maybe **the queer theme/subject matter** is the key to defining what is queer art. How does one even define what a queer content in art is? That is what I discuss further in the coming chapters. Here I focus on some rather clear cases, and I assume that the subject matter is known to be queer. For example, representations of queer people(/bodies) and lives(/lifestyles) are prevalent themes in the alleged queer art. So let's imagine we have identified a queer theme in an artwork. Is it always queer art?

I start by ruling out types of artwork that have a queer theme but are not, in my opinion, queer art. There are, for example, quite a few photographic series by (supposedly) non-queer artists portraying queer people. For instance, J. Lehtola's *Some Girls* (2008) is a portrait series of ladyboys from Thailand, and T. Mäki's *TRANSGENDER* (2018) depicts transgender people. The latter includes childhood photographs and portraits after the transition, often showing partly nude body with visible scarring from, for example, mastectomy[8]. They both portray queer people, they have a queer subject in this sense, but I would not call them queer art. (Disclaimer: I am judging only the queerness of these artworks, not their other qualities or qualifications.)

The famous proverb "nothing about us without us", often used by minorities, is useful here[9]. Are these queer people really represented like they would like to be represented? Or, are the works only the straight

8 Breast removal / top surgery made sometimes for transgender people assigned female at birth.

9 see also Kokkonen & Ohtonen, 2019

artist's quest to understand "the other" and showcase this "other" to the rest of the straight community? This is a question of self-determination and gaze. Is the gaze (of the photographer) objectifying or not? Unfortunately, there are often elements of voyeurism when non-queer artists make (photographic) works of queer people. Their photographs seem to say "look at them" instead of "look at us". The people represent their gender/queer identity, not themselves as individuals. (see chapter 5)

I believe this kind of distinction is important because, in the end, it is about power positions. When the straight, cisgender photographer is contemplating queer issues in their artworks, they can easily end up projecting their personal views about their subject. They may not understand/notice their own biases. Something that may appear "weird" and "interesting", for a member of the majority may have a political, even life-and-death -meaning to someone in the LGBTQIA community. (This is always the danger when a member of a majority/privileged group tries to represent a member of a minority/un-privileged group.)

When a queer artist depicts their community (or themselves), it is more probable that there is less hierarchy between the artist and the model. Undoubtedly, the queer communities are manifold, and hierarchies also exist within. (It is so easy to lapse and essentialize even if a few paragraphs ago I advised not to.) Intersectional perspective is always needed. For example, a highly esteemed (white) queer/gay photographer R. Mapplethorpe portrayed a lot of other queer/gay people. However, they were criticized for objectifying black models (Yingling, 1990, pp. 11–12). Art/photography can be considered queer, but it is not without other troubling issues. "Nothing about us without us" should continue "...and nothing with us without consideration and respect".

All these examples are based on the assumption that the identity of the artist (queer or not), is known. Often that is quite an unreasonable demand. It may help to detect power structures, but it also implies that the artist's identity (queer or not) flows into the artworks and refines them. This is something that I criticized earlier. Disclosing one's identity might also be risky for some or unattractive for others. It cannot be compulsory because visibility also benefits the "protocols of surveillance" (Getsy, 2019, p. 66). This raises a question on the visibility of queerness and questions

the need for visibility in general. I will come back to this multiple times in the following chapters. Maybe **the spectator** also has their part to play (see chapter 1.2). Personal knowledge of the queer culture or of being queer may help to identify the not-so-obvious queer art.

One risky step deeper into the definitions of 'queer' in art/photography. I argued that art/photography is queer when preferably both the artist and the subject matter are (recognized as) queer. Still, what I have noticed is that a lot of this kind of queer art is rather straight. It is not necessarily radical or non-normative. For example, there are a lot of photographic series that focus on normalising queer people's lives. These photographs seem to imply "we are like anyone else". There is an aspiration to normalcy and acceptance. Halberstam (2012) has criticized this assimilation into the dominant cultural norms of, for example, respectability, marriage/family unit, reproduction, and a middle-class lifestyle. Adaptation to those norms means accepting them too. Not very queer, right?

Not all queer lives are queer/strange/unusual/non-normative/radical, nor is all art about queer lives or by queer artists either. Identifying queer does not mean the person is somehow "different" or liberal even if they carry that marginalized identity with them through life. My attempt is not to place judgements on how radical someone's queer life or art should be. I am more interested in what the non-normative means in queer art. I approach this using the norm-defying verb, to queer.

1.2 QUEERING ART

Definition of queer (verb)

1a: to consider or interpret (something) from a perspective that rejects traditional categories of gender and sexuality: to apply ideas from queer theory to (something)
b: to make or modify (something) in a way that reflects one's rejection of gender and sexuality norms

(Merriam-Webster dictionary)

The verb form of 'queer' is a multipurpose tool. 'To queer' is to look from a non-normative angle. It releases the magical queer potential. Queering can reveal queer possibilities that are located (as well as hidden) anywhere (Getsy, 2019, p. 71). Queering and queer reading are often used as synonyms when reinterpreting works of art, for example. Queering can also dismantle the hidden power structures/traditions in the process of creating art. This is what I have done in my artistic work. In this chapter, I discuss what it means to queer art.

The artist's queer identity becomes important also when queering art. The focus is often on the artist's biography that has made their queerness known. Both the artist's biography and their works can be queered. Through this lens, a queer artist's supposedly queer themes are revealed. Or alternatively, the artworks may show something queer about the artist. This kind of queering of the works can be done to contemporary artists or artists who have already passed. Here lies the already familiar risk of essentializing when the queer identity is assumed to produce queer content. This is why one should be careful not to add speculative meanings to artworks or at least not to claim them to be unambiguous.

Artist's (known) queer identity can be a key that opens **queer themes and narratives** in their artworks. "Queer readings are sometimes forensic, tracking the traces buried or exposed by a queer maker." (Getsy,

2019, p. 71) The queer themes might be coded. Maybe there has been a need to hide one's identity and still the urge to communicate aspects of it. A queer reading of (historical) works of art can be a way to fight historical erasure from the future.

Queering can be an excellent tool for exposing norms and power positions. For example, if the subject matter is two people of the same gender, the normative reading would label them as friends. A queer reading would at least consider them to be lovers instead. It is crucial to acknowledge that something that is regarded as queer now might not have been queer back when the artwork was made. Likewise, something that was queer before might not be queer now. This is essential, especially when queering historical works of art.

The intent and identity of the artist can also be entirely ignored when queering a work of art. Artworks travel in time, and their meanings change depending on the audience. **A (queer) spectator** can read into the artwork meanings that are relevant to them personally. This kind of queering that is not historically accurate can be a strategy for a queer spectator to read art against the grain. Queer readings can also be creative. They may identify the (queer) "capacities in a work's form, content, or context that make room for the otherwise and question the artificial bounds of the natural, that eroticize sameness, and so on."(Getsy, 2019, p. 71) In some cases, 'reading into' can be a positive thing and "for queer readers, it can be a lifeline."(Getsy, 2019, p. 71)

This kind of queer reading/queering can function as an empowering practice for a queer spectator when the world of art is saturated with (hetero/gender)normative[10] narratives. Sometimes it may require personal knowledge of queer culture to be able to read a work of art against the grain, to queer it. This can be made by reinterpreting relationships, bodies, dress etc. but also more abstract qualities of the artworks. As Pilcher (2017) writes, "we do not need to treat queer art as a territory with fixed borders". The works of art can have a voice of their own that is "independent of the identities and life histories of their makers" (p. 13) With queer reading, the spectator can make an artwork queer.

10 Heteronormativity is the assumption that there are only two genders and that everyone is heterosexual.

Abstract works of art can also be queered and adopted. For example, D. Getsy (2015) has reinterpreted 60s abstract sculpture from a queer perspective. They found queer potential in them even if it was never the intention of the artists themselves. "Queer experiments with abstraction's afiguration, and its refusal of instant recognizability are related to ... practices of locating alternatives and reading against the grain." (Getsy, 2019, p. 68) Queering artworks may open up new paths for understanding the pieces. It can be a way of unravelling the queer potential in art.

In my practice, the most relevant aspect of queering is to look at **the methods** of producing artworks. My attempt is to queer the way I make photographs. I concentrate on the underlying power positions and norms that are the basis of many orthodox methods in photography/art. Queering these methods of working and producing images can, in my opinion, expose their relations to heteronormativity and/or patriarchy. This kind of critical approach should not be confused with contemporary art's eternal quest to find new innovative ways of working. When using the term 'queering', there should be an intent to dismantle norms relating to gender and/or sexuality.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

My attempt here is to experiment with image making methods that combine both queer and queering. All of the chosen strategies have a queer content, and they queer the photographic practice somehow. I have chosen these methods in a somewhat arbitrary fashion. The theories resonated with me. There was a queer quality to them, direct or underlying.

I am using multiple methods and accept the perhaps heterogeneous outcome or incoherent series of works. I am, in fact, intrigued by the contradiction between these methods and images they produce. It reflects the experience I have when discussing the concept of queer. It is not clear and clean-cut. I am also not suggesting that these are the only or even right ways of, or to, queer. Queer is a multitude. These approaches

offer only a glimpse. Each chapter discusses one strategy and hopefully provides a more in-depth understanding of what is (to) queer art. My chosen pseudonym extends the queering to my artist/photographer/author position.

PSEUDONYM

The pseudonym is part of my queer/ing strategy. Jussi Lautu is my given name Jussila, Utu rearranged. Jussi is a traditional Finnish male first name. Jussila (the original meaning is a house or farm owned by Jussi) is a reminiscence of patrilineage[11] and thus very much patriarchal. I need to queer this heritage a little bit.

Using a male pseudonym has been a popular coping mechanism for female and gender non-conforming artists, and sometimes the only way to get works published. My pseudonym is a homage to them. Using a male name is also a way to be disguised as an artist who is an individual. A mere artist instead of a *queer* artist or a *female* artist. (My given name is gender-neutral/feminine.)

Maybe the masculine name also affects the way the viewer reacts to the artworks. There is still a biased (intentional or unconscious) attitude to men as more competent. Why not play with this bias? Why not confuse the viewer a little? Why not emphasize the unstable qualities of (binary) gender and identity? This also stresses the importance of a name and how it affects our perception of others.

I am aware that I am in a position were being playful with my name/assumed identity is possible. This is not the case for many transgender/non-binary/gender-nonconforming people to whom misgendering can cause high anxiety. I cannot emphasize enough, that if someone you know changes their name, respect their decision and use their chosen name.

Using a pseudonym is a way to avoid identity politics and draw attention away from myself. I do not want my identity to be in the centre of my art practice. I do not wish the artworks to be read through my

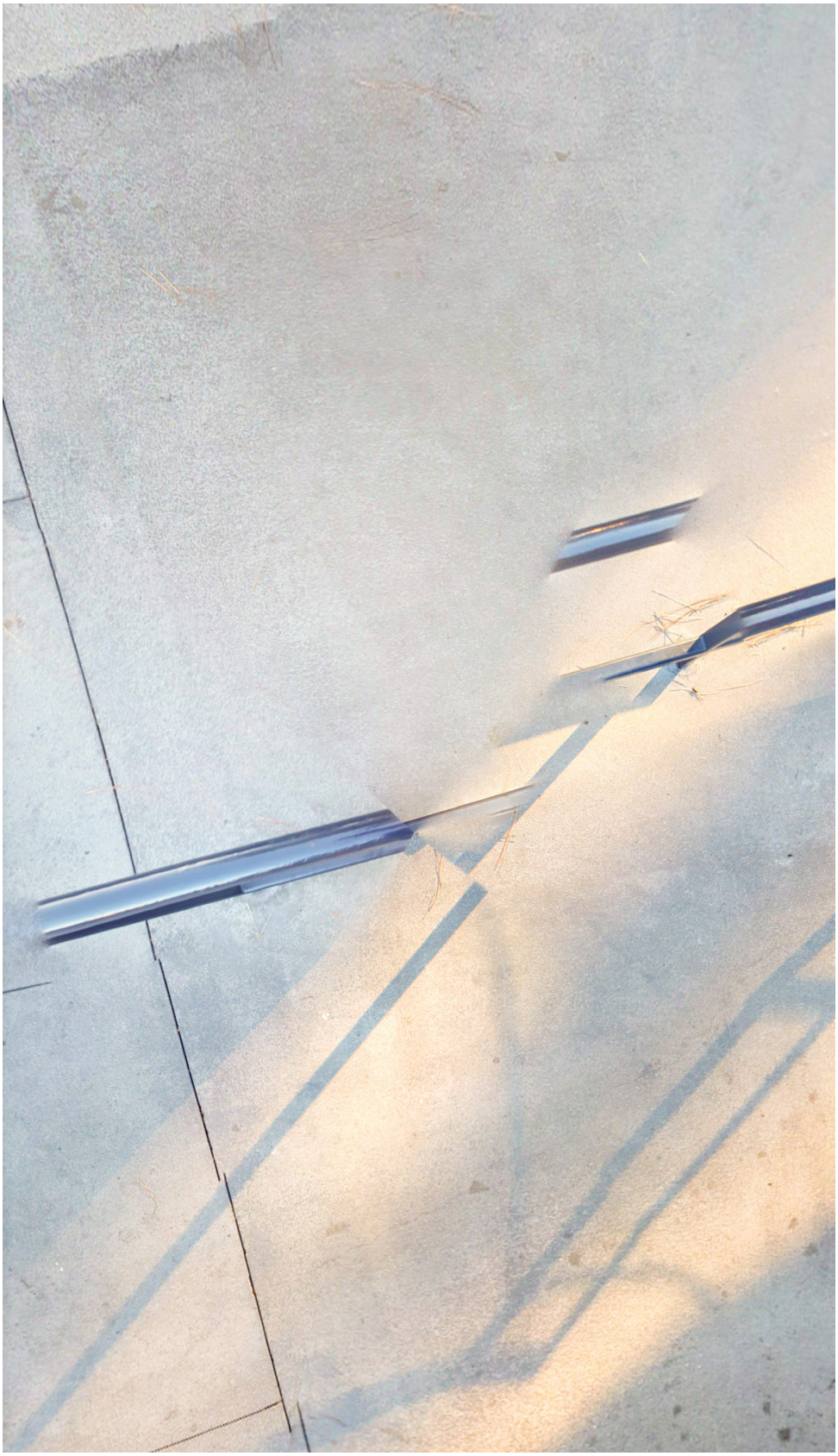
11 Patrilineage is a kinship system in which an individual inherits through the male kin from father to son, from man to man.

identity if I can avoid it. I also feel that my art practice is a discussion with other artists and writers. It does not happen in solitude. This is one reason why I find the author position slightly awkward. Undoubtedly, many ideas have a connection to me as a person, to my identity. Still, they are equally affected by what I read and the artworks that I see. Giving the stage for other non-binary people is one part of this attempt (see chapter 5). It is an effort to blur the conception of the artist as an island or a mythical genius.

Using a pseudonym queers my position as an artist. My chosen pseudonym is queer in content as it blurs the gender binary. It questions my gender as stagnant either-or and suggests something else instead, a rearrangement.

2.
FAILURE AND THE QUEER ABSTRACTION

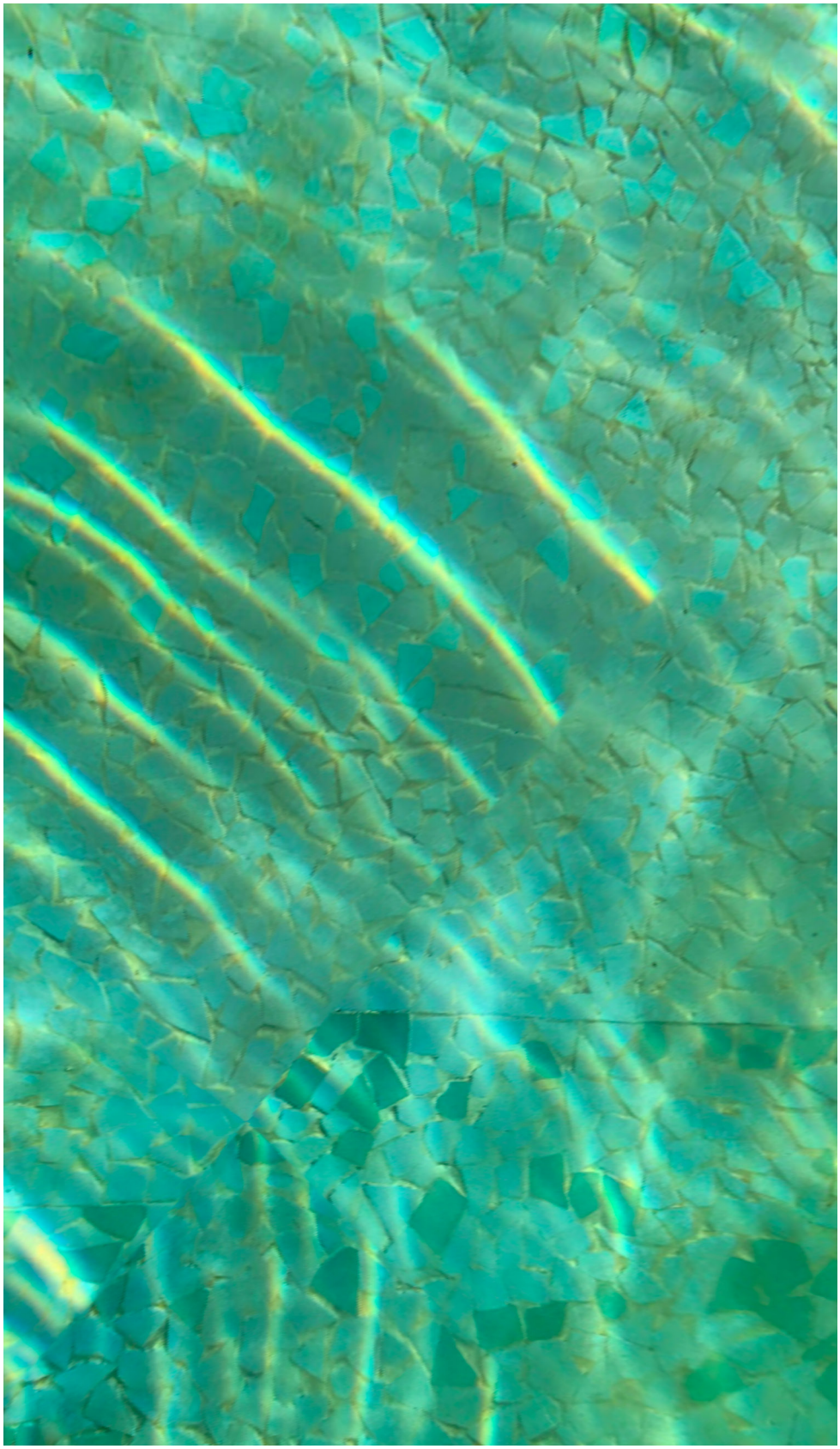
queer | normativity / legibility
-ing | tradition / technique



Lines of Flight I (2020)

Lines of Flight II (2020)

Lines of Flight III (2020)



Lines of Flight IV (2020)

> "Sometimes I stand by the edge of where the ocean meets
> the beach, and I look out into the sea, so I can feel
> like something that does not have an end."
>
> T. Alabanza, *The Sea* (2017)

J. Halberstam (2011) argues that queer people are always a failure in a heteronormative society. Instead of conforming to the norms of the society, they suggest that queer people should embrace their failure (p. 3). D. Getsy (2019) proposes that abstraction is one way of resisting the norms of (queer) representation that are closely tied to the categorizations of the (non-normative) body (p. 67). In this chapter, I discuss Halberstam's theory of queer failure and Getsy's arguments on the queer abstraction. These are the basis of my first (queer) artistic strategy.

In history, queer people have made failure their style. In the late 19th century 'queer' meant 'worthless', 'questionable' or 'suspicious' (Merriam-Webster). It was a slur against gays and gender non-conforming people. Queer (or then LGB) people hijacked the word in the late 1980s and nowadays it is mostly considered a neutral or even positive term. Queer people turned the negative attitudes they faced into a common denominator. They chose to co-exist, and their failure made it possible. A slur that was meant to divide or alienate people actually became a bond that tied them together. I suggest that this is a clear example of how queer failure can be turned into a victory.

In *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Halberstam argues that queer failure can become an art. It can be revolutionary. A (queer) person who falls outside the norm can actually be more aware of the absurdity of the norm and thus more capable of imagining alternatives. Failing can be a method of finding different ways of existing. It can be a window for new forms of expression. (Halberstam, 2011, p. 88, 96)

When talking about the queer art of failure, Halberstam does not mean the kind of lucky mistakes that lead to new surprising and desirable artistic outcomes. Queer failure is not quite like the experimental creative process where coincidence and failure play an essential role. A queer

person does not just stumble upon their identity or its consequences and failures. Queer failure is not about choice or accident. It is something that is forced upon queer people by the heteronormative society. It is a question of societal structures as much as it is of individuals. Halberstam encourages to embrace the failure from the start as it is inevitable anyway (2011, p. 22). Nevertheless, like the artistic findings through failure, also queer failure can be more alluring than success. "Failure to fit into the normal can be upheld as a virtue" (Getsy, 2019, p. 65).

From the failing position, from outside the norm, the normative life does look rather bleak and restricting. Failing can be a strategy to resist identity politics/individualism and the competitive nature of a capitalist society. (Born to lose and proud!) It can be anti-capitalist. (Halberstam, 2011, pp. 3–4) The ideal capitalist is an endlessly consuming, always independent, and somewhat lonely being (The Invisible Committee, 2007, p. 20). It might actually be good to revolt and refuse to become the "I" with capital(ist) letters. If you are already failing to identify with, for example, the media representation because of your queer identity, you might be more equipped to resist the loneliness of extreme individualism marketed by the same media.

Halberstam is not the only one to defend the failing/outsider position of queer people and to theorize in terms that have been used to reject and suppress queer people and their experiences[12]. Within art theory, R. Lorenz (2012, 2019) calls their approach to queer art a freak theory. They turn the negative connotations of the word 'freak' to their advantage. They compare the queer (art) community to a freak show. Lorenz looks at what positive implications the freak circus might have had for the freaks themselves[13] (2019, pp. 66–67). They use a somewhat similar argumentation to Halberstam. Everybody outside the community is named "dupes" who the freaks can deceive (2019, pp. 68–70). Those "dupes" were cut out from understanding the reality and the perks of a tight community of the freaks (Lorenz, 2019, pp. 68–70). (This also questions if queer art should be understandable outside the queer community, by the "dupes" and the normies). Being a freak, according to Lorenz, enables access to a different

12 e.g. Howard, 2014; Stryker, 1994

13 also Clare 2015, pp. 89–90

kind of knowledge, an outsider view. (Lorenz, 2019, p. 76) Both freaks and failures are in an excellent position in this sense.

There are many examples of queer art/photography that proudly make visible the "failures" and monstrosity of a queer/transgender body and celebrate them[14]. Representations of the gender reassignment process (and the resulting scarring) or defying good taste with over the top aesthetics are popular. The adoption of cryptids[15], such as mermaids, in the queer imagery, is also a way to embrace the freakdom (Hord, 2018, p. 2). They play with the claims that queerness is something debatable. Many queer artists also utilize the posthumanist approach and visualize the crossings of human and non-human animals (Halberstam, 2019, p. 23). These approaches in works of art show different kinds of bodies and ways of living. They stretch the normative perceptions of gender, sexuality, and even humanness. The failure of queerness can be a source of pride.

This kind of full exposure is needed to gain acceptance and rights in society. Without it, many queer identities would not be recognized as legitimate identifications. It is undeniable that visibility is politically urgent (see chapter 5). However, this strategy has its downsides. It creates new norms also within the queer community. If you do not live up to these monstrous/outrageous/freakish representations of queer life or queer bodies, you may become a failure as a queer as well.

Getsy (2019) discusses this demand for non-normativity, "The pressure to make oneself visible as not-normal has been, itself, the norm." (p. 66). That kind of openness and exposure might not be a safe option for all queer people in all surroundings. At worst, it may be life-threatening. Besides, even the non-normative figurative artworks and representations of bodies are always categorized. Gestures and fashions are still culturally marked (and gendered). One way of resisting the demand for openness and visibility or "the cultural marking of the human body" is abstraction (Getsy, 2019, p. 67).

The queer abstraction was first discussed by Halberstam (2005, chapt. 5) and further developed by Getsy (2015, 2019). It is a way to resist an objectifying or judgemental gaze. Abstraction resists the urge to

14 e.g. S. Davidmann, J. Desana, Z. Drucker, M. Gutierrez, J. Huxtable & C. Opie

15 Cryptids are mythical creatures in folklores, such as The Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot etc.

recognize and categorize. Abstraction can be another way of working from queer experience and queer revolt. If radical visibility, for example, the flaunting of the monstrous queer bodies, suggests that queerness is always something visible, abstraction asks what is visible? What are you looking for? When radical visibility gives the viewer the pleasure of gazing at the subject, the abstract is not that willing to surrender. It has a different kind of power that demands the viewer to participate. (Getsy, 2019, p. 70)

The abstract resists a single and straightforward reading. It can be a way to work with complex queer realities. In the first chapter, I struggled with the definition of the term 'queer'. It is just too slippery. Abstraction seems to offer some of the same ambiguous qualities that are characteristics of the term 'queer'.

However, because abstraction is always inconclusive, it is a good target for criticism. It does not offer disclosure, familiarity or certainty. Sceptics may insist that if they can't see it (the queer/ness) easily, it must not exist. This is the same argument that has been used throughout history to erase and deny the presence and existence of queer lives. Demanding clarity is a way of expressing power. Being unclear and unreadable can be a way of resisting that power. Queer abstraction makes things possible and imaginable but, like all categories, it will fail us. Queer abstraction is not enough, and sometimes confrontational visibility is also needed. (Getsy, 2019, p.65) I explore this kind of more straightforward strategy of visibility in chapter 5.

One example of queer abstraction is F. Gonzalez-Torres' *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991). The queer and political aspects of the work would not be revealed without the backstory about the artist's identity and private life. The work consists of a pile of wrapped candy that is the exact weight of Gonzales-Torres' former lover who died of AIDS. The museum visitors are welcome to take and eat the candies, and this way, the sculpture slowly disappears. The artwork invites the spectator to share the sweet memory the artist had of their lover. The sculpture is very intimate but also political. The body of a lover ditched in the corner like so many other neglected queer AIDS patients during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Still, the work in its abstract form resists a single interpretation. For someone who is not aware of the history behind the work of art, the

meaning remains more open.

In *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* the queerness of the artwork is, I believe, dependent on the backstory of the work. C. Darwen (2016) makes a thought-provoking queer reading of *Pink Tons (2009)*, a sculpture by R. Horn. The author argues that the physical qualities of the (abstract) work make it queer. The sculpture is a pale pink vessel full of water and weighs 4,514 kg. Darwen writes that the artwork "shouts "female" and "male" at the same time and equally quietly--a piece of transgender art, masculine and feminine, massive and breakable, transparent on top and opaque at the sides." (2016). They suggest that the sculpture is at once masculine and feminine, monumental, and delicate. I cannot help but wonder how much this queer reading of the work was influenced by the fact that Horn is (openly) a queer-identified artist. Also, it is almost amusing how easily even an abstract sculpture obtains these gendered qualities.

My examples above of queer abstraction are both sculptures. Getsy discusses sculpture (2015) or art in general (2019). They rarely mention photography directly. I did struggle to find examples of queer abstraction in photography (that were directly named as such). Some of the works by M. Rochat and W. Tillmans could be interpreted that way. Filmmaker B. Hammer also writes about the queer possibilities of abstraction in film. "Multiple readings, understanding, and namings are promoted by abstractions providing richness, diversity, and complexity. ...it is a worldview that embraces flexibility, possibilities, and multiple understandings of phenomena." (1993, p. 202)

There is one instance, however, where Getsy briefly discusses photography in relation to queer abstraction. According to them, painting and sculpture come into being through their physical media, whereas photography starts with the image capture. (Simmons, 2015, p. 51) This is why the relationship between photography and the body/world is very different than that of sculpture or painting and the body/world. They suggest that the "question for abstract photography would be medium-specific: What were the events during which the form of the photograph occurred?" (Simmons, 2015, p. 51) I am proposing *Lines of Flight I, II, III & IV* in this series as examples of queer abstraction in photography. The event where these photographs occurred is, in my opinion, quite queer.

METHOD

Lines of Flight I, II, III & IV are screenshots from Google Street View. They are fragments of 360˚ photosphere images uploaded by the users and merged into Google Maps. They are all abstractions caused by glitches. The camera has failed, and it has imagined a new view of the world. In a sense, these are found images, appropriations of images that already exist. I am reinterpreting or queering the pictures.

In Google Street View, anyone can participate in creating a map of the world. It seems that poor quality images with a lot of glitches can be incorporated into the map. As a photographer/artist, I find this a fascinating territory to work in. The view of the world in Google Street View is surprisingly tolerant of errors and failures. It is probably a much more "accurate" representation of the world now than if it was technically correct. These failings in technology create an opening for a different understanding, much like in the L.U. Marks' theory on haptic visuality (see chapter 4).

The images are not entirely abstract. There are recognizable elements in all of them, only something is a bit off. They are pictures of real things in the world. The normative technology (that aims to accuracy) malfunctioned and created these semi-abstract scenes. The malfunctions queer the scenery. The failure becomes the queering element. They are also failures as photographs because of their poor technical qualities. This I emphasize by enlarging them.

These images queer the practice of photography because of their appropriating nature. They are screenshots, and there is no action of photography (with a camera) on my part. I have not been out and about in the world. My bodily relationship to the world, and taking these photographs is very different than while working with a camera. I am not only resisting to show a body but also minimizing my own bodily connection to the world that I am photographing. I hope, however, that the large size of the images creates an absorbing viewing experience. It might serve as a way to establish a bodily relationship with the photos without bodies (see exhibition plan).

I borrowed the name 'Lines of Flight' from G. Deleuze and F.

Guattari. I encountered the term in transgender studies and follow the interpretation of M. Fournier (2014). A line of flight designates a possibility of escape and change in the crossing of two paradigms. The term has been used in transgender studies to describe gender dysphoria or transition. It describes the moment when "the face you see in the mirror is not a face for you anymore"(Fournier, 2014, pp. 121–122). The frame of representation is built on gender binarism, and the materialism you see in the mirror escapes this frame. The "supposedly familiar landscape is blurred by the transposition of gender-signifying marks from one milieu to another. The socially determined coordinates of familiarity/identity/gender no longer form a legible pattern." (Fournier, 2014, pp. 121–122)

Deleuze and Guattari describe their philosophy as a 'geophilosophy' meaning that it is a system resembling a landscape. There are only spaces structured by various and contingent power apparatuses but no binaries. When this kind of geophilosophy is applied to the gender/transgender spectrum, it allows the conceptualizing of gender without the binary gender system. Gender is something that can be navigated as a landscape, and gender transition is a move in that landscape. It can be done in various directions, not only between two locations. (Fournier, 2014, pp. 121–122)

The term is especially fitting for these works. They are about queer failures such as being outside the binary. They are shot in Google Maps that is a landscape or territory pictured in a 360˚ view. These 360˚ images have no binaries because they are spheres that have no edges. The glitches are like the lines of flight in that non-binary territory.

3 .
CORNER

queer | *binary / in between*
-ing | *flatness / tradition / space / theory*

(the) in-between.

a point at which significant change occurs

stays
still
changing

a dangerous or awkward position,
from which escape is difficult

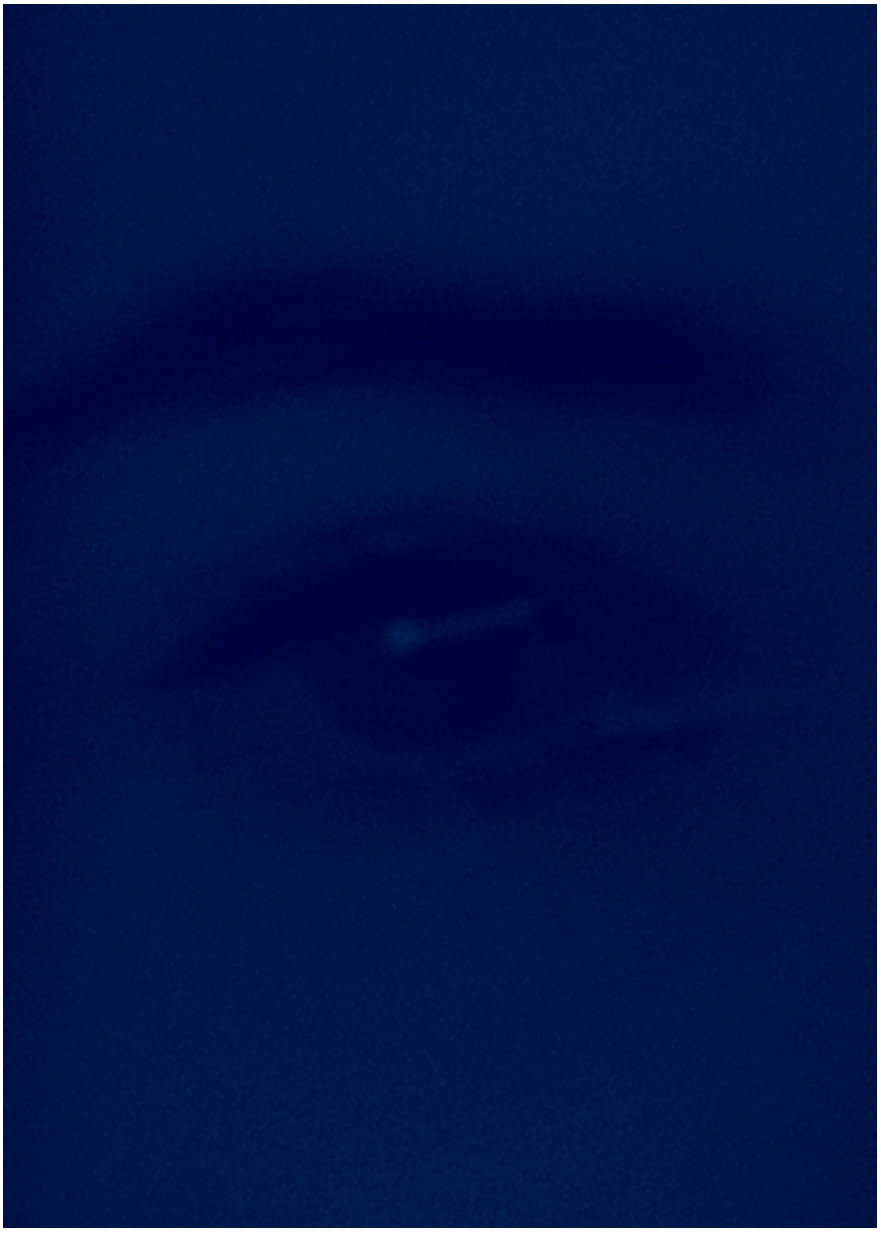
the moment,
where there is a possibility of escape

There lies the sweet corpse of Ross.

4.
THE PENETRATING GAZE

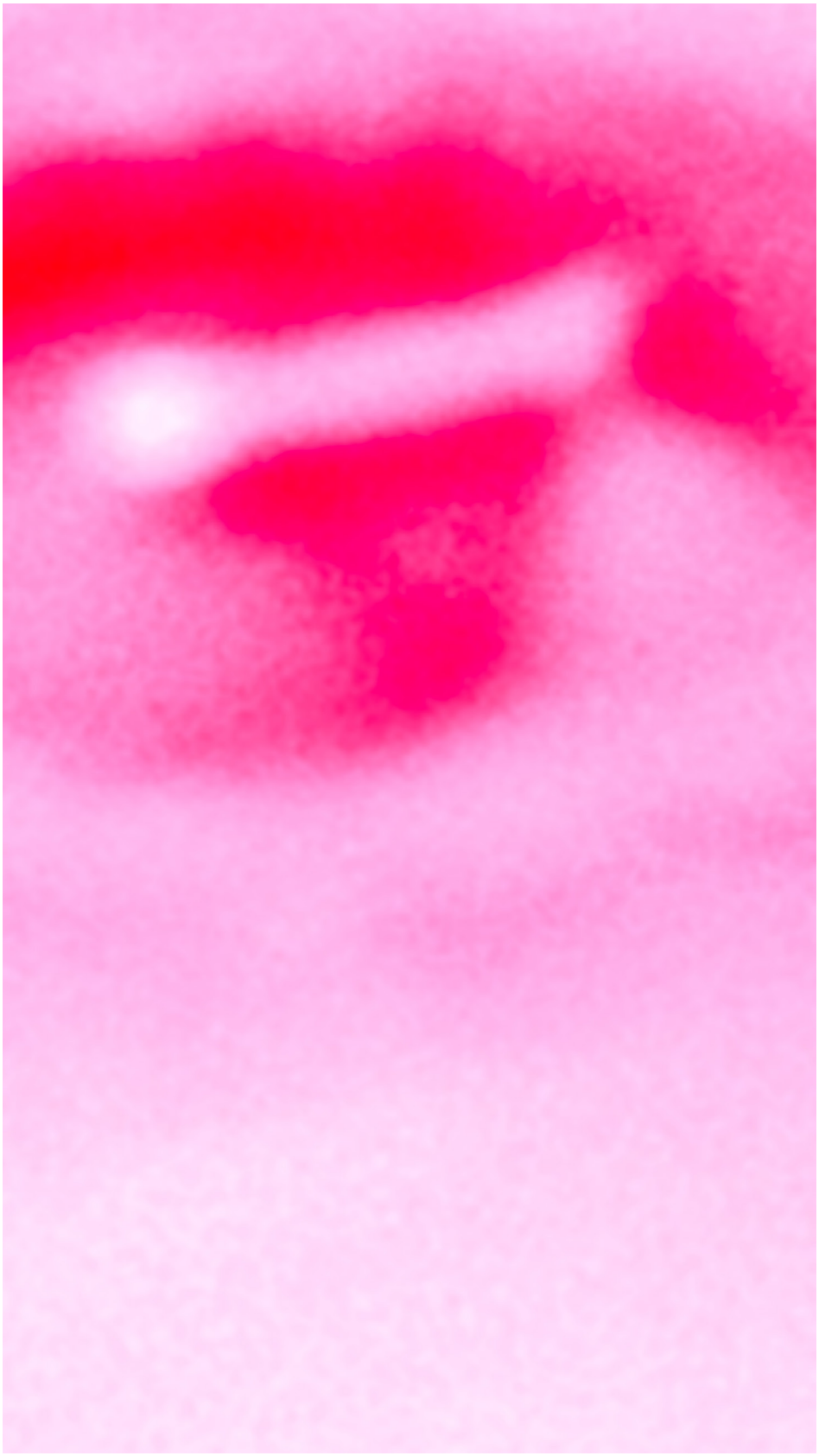
queer | *exposure / experience*
-ing | *technique / image as a window / gaze*

Needle in the Eye I (2020)



Needle in the Eye II (2020)

Needle in the Eye III (2020)



Piercing Eye (2020)

In this chapter, I introduce the theory of haptic visuality by L.U. Marks and discuss how it can be and has been used as a method for queer(ing) photography and film. Haptic visuality moves the discussion from queer abstraction to partial visibility. It also addresses the failures of the (figurative) image as a communicator of (queer/minority) experience. I discuss the political potential of haptic visuality and how it can work as a method of non-objectifying gaze. It might also queer the experience of looking at an image.

Marks introduces the concept of haptic visuality in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000). It is a theory of film, but I find it useful for photography as well. Simply put, haptic visuality means that film can speak to senses other than sight or hearing such as smell, touch or taste. This kind of non-ocularcentric[16] imagery creates a more immersive viewing experience if the spectator is willing to surrender and be penetrated by the image.

Traditionally, the experiencing of film has been thought to function mainly based on sight and hearing. This is logical because the techniques of film are sound and image. However, Marks criticizes this ocularcentric perspective. They encourage to touch the surface of the film with one's eyes. They offer the use of, for example, graininess or underexposure as methods that force the viewer to complement the image and thus to participate (Marks, 2000, p. 173). When the viewer cannot rely on their sight, other senses activate. To function, haptic visuality requires a degree of activity on the part of the viewer. This way the viewer cannot remain in the position of a passive observer (Marks, 2000, p. 177). Similarly, Hammer (1993) uses abstraction as a tool to activate the viewer (p. 202).

Marks explores haptic visuality when interpreting intercultural films. Interculturalism refers to the fact that the creators of these films live in some way between two cultures (Marks, 2000, p. 1). They have, for example, an immigrant background. Marks believes that these films employ haptic visuality for two main reasons. Limited budgets have pushed them to use cheaper technology such as camcorders instead of professional film cameras. This has forced them to compromise on image quality. Secondly, the films deal with memories and intercultural identities

16 ocularcentric = emphasis on eyesight

that do not convey simply through ocularcentric means. (p. 6-7) Marks argues that there are limitations in the Western ocularcentric visual presentation. It cannot thoroughly pass on the intercultural experience or communicate the multi-sensory nature of memories. (chapt. 4)

In E. M. Bergsmark's film *Something Must Break* (2014), in my interpretation, haptic visuality is used to describe the emotions of the main character Sebastian/Ellie, who is transgender. There are a lot of scenes in the film where the picture is left as if it were unfinished. Many scenes are poorly illuminated or grainy. They require the viewer to complement what they see. The graininess highlighs the surface of the image and makes it visible/tangible. By blurring the view, unfinished images also give the viewer a hint that the picture is not always omnipotent. It never tells the whole story. The film's abundant use of close-ups, where the camera slides on the actors' skin, forces the viewer into the middle of the events. They cannot merely remain a spectator because they cannot perceive or control the overall picture.

I suggest that the term 'interculturalism' can be replaced with the concept of 'transculturalism'. It also describes mobility, changeability, and the combination of many different cultural characteristics. Often, films(/ photographs) about gender reassignment process or transgender people focus on the visual aspects/appearances. The use of the mirror is already a cliché in the transgender portrayals in film. However, such descriptions reduce the transgender identity by associating it with mere appearances. Haptic visuality may convey the experience of being transgender with more nuances. The gender reassignment process, for example, is substantially related to the materiality of the body and does not return to the outer shell alone.

Marks discusses the ethical issues of the images/portrayals that are based solely on the visuality or showing/revealing. The act of looking and the ocular system are intrinsically linked to control and objectification (Woods, 2016, p. 4). Marks (2000) writes, "...the critique need not be extended to all forms of visuality. It may apply to the visuality typical of capitalism, consumerism, surveillance, and ethnography: a sort of instrumental vision that uses the thing seen as an object for knowledge and control." (p.131). Nevertheless, they are careful not to present other senses as more

meaningful than visuality but insist on the need to distinguish between objectifying and non-objectifying gaze (Marks, 2000, p.131–132).

Marks is addressing the same issues of mandatory visibility/openness, as Getsy (2019) does with their theory on queer abstraction. They are both sceptical towards the demand to make differences visible. Both argue that it may, in some cases, benefit surveillance and control. Getsy offers abstraction as a way to avoid this trap of visibility. Marks' idea of haptic visuality with the incomplete images/visibility, is also taking representation towards abstraction. They both offer the viewer an uncertain position.

Traditionally, the spectator (of film) is often granted (or placed in) the position of a god. From this omniscient view, they can remotely observe the events of the film. The spectator of a photograph is often in this position as well. However, if photography/film uses the means of haptic visuality (or maybe also abstraction), it breaks the security wall between the viewer and the film and, as H. Hauru (2018) puts it, penetrates the viewer. A viewer who exposes themself to haptic visuality becomes porous. They are no longer entitled to the same kind of voyeuristic pleasure as when being hard and unpunctured. They become emotional and vulnerable.

Because of its penetrating nature, I suggest that haptic visuality can be used as a political tool for film narration and photography. It forces the viewer to invest more physically in the film/photograph. It evokes holistic bodily memories and emotions in the viewer. Therefore, it can nourish feelings of empathy better than an ocularcentric film/photograph where the viewer can opt-out and stay voyeuristic. In the film *Something Must Break,* haptic visuality can be read as political. It is used to convey the experiences of a transgender person, a member of a discriminated minority. If the viewer is open and their skin is porous, they end up being empathic to the character. The otherness of the transgender person infiltrates them. Through this shared bodily emotional experience, one can identify and empathize with the film's character. Sensuality and touch become a political force and an instrument of influence.

W. Benjamin (1935/1968) offers quite a different view on the penetrative nature of film, and it is quite bleak. To Benjamin a painter is

like a magician but the technicality and fragmented nature of the film make the camera operator (Benjamin uses the gendered and thus outdated term 'cameraman') more like a surgeon. "The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. … Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web." (1968/2019, p. 185). Benjamin suggests that films penetrate the viewer because they catch them by surprise with fast cuts.

Is Benjamin's cameraperson/surgeon even relevant to photography in any way? Photography does not penetrate the viewer with surprising fast cuts. It is often rather still. Maybe shocking news images can catch the viewer by a similar surprise and have a physical effect. According to R. Barthes (1983), a photograph can be piercing also in a more slow and non-dramatic way. It can have a punctum, a point in the image that draws the viewer's attention and moves them. "The punctum of a photograph is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)." (Barthes, 1983, p. 27). This pricking is, I think, penetration of the viewer. There is a haptic relationship with the image that is not concretely physical but still felt.

The viewer for Marks (and Barthes) has to, in my understanding, be active/vulnerable in order to be penetrated. For Benjamin, the viewer is more passive, a patient. The development of technology enables penetration. In contrast, for Marks, it is the outdated/cheap technology that creates an image quality that is haptic and penetrating. I find these contradictions intriguing. Especially when I consider the failing technology with queer failure. Here the failure exposes possibilities that success (hi-tech cameras) would have not.

Denying legibility or easy access from the viewer may sometimes be useful because it requires the viewer to be active. It demands vulnerability also from the spectator and not only (always) from the subject. Haptic visuality can function as a gentle communicator of emotions and experiences. Blurring can be radical.

METHOD

Needle in the Eye I, II & III concentrate on exposure. I did experiments on how much (or little?) has to be visible for the viewer to recognize the subject in the image. Queer and transgender people are often forced to monitor every aspect of their existence, and a small detail might cause them to be misidentified (Getsy, 2019, p. 67). They(/we) have to navigate a world where everything is gendered. It is often a question of the tiniest nuances whether someone is identified as a male or a female (as it is often either-or, less frequently non-binary). This kind of ambivalence of visibility or recognizability is what I aim for. This is what I consider to be the queer content of these works.

Often a photograph hides as much as it shows. Often it is considered to be a window to the world, a rather passive view. Following Marks' ideas, I wanted to activate the viewer. These images cannot be seen with just one glance. (Or maybe they are easier to see with a glance but not by staring?) In this sense, they are not straight photography but rather queer. They are disturbing the power balance between the viewer and the image. The subject seems to be just barely within reach of the observer. They don't give the viewer the pleasure of owning or controlling the view. A bit like the Swedish proverb 'nagel i ögat', a nail in the eye, that stands for something annoying, these images are annoying to look at.

Marks (2000) discusses haptic visuality as an image's ability to reach other senses than seeing. In *Piercing eye*, I take a somewhat literal approach and (plan to) print the photograph on velvet fabric. The image is an enlargement of a detail where the graininess brings the texture visible. The cropping and the blown-up size are an attempt to blur the subject and make the image incomplete.

The subject matter in these images refers to the activity of the image that does not surrender to the gaze. It gazes back. In the exhibition (see exhibition plan) these images are placed on every wall of the room. They have an eye on the visitor. This gestures the series' underlying theme of surveillance.

5.
NON-BINARY SELF-PORTRAITS

queer | visibility / power / representation
-ing | gaze / authorship

Self-portrait of Aro Valtteri Mielonen (2020)

Self-portrait of Jussi (2020)

Self-portrait of Luna Inkeri (2020)

Self-portrait of Jonne Sippola (2020)

Self-portrait of Ruska (2020)

Self-portrait of Valo Syksy Elia (2020)

Self-portrait of Kamos (2020)

Self-portrait of Frank (2020)

Self-portrait of Jonna Tuupainen (2020)

> "Sometimes, we need to see each other. Sometimes we need others to see us. Sometimes we need to imagine how we might see."
> (Getsy, 2019, p. 72)

In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between the photographer/artist and the model. I continue with the problematics of visibility and minority representation, but I turn to defend visibility. My emphasis is on transgender/non-binary[17] representation (even though many of these issues concern all/most queer people). The *Non-binary Self-portraits* series pictures non-binary people. I examine some of the structures/movements that discriminate against transgender people at the moment. I hope that this illustrates why the problematics of visibility are the undercurrent in this whole thesis and why the theme is difficult to avoid when discussing queer art. I argue that visibility is both needed and dangerous.

Queer abstraction and haptic visuality offer alternatives to visibility and exposure. Their potential in exploring/expressing queer realities and experiences are vast, but they are not enough. Those(/these) realities and experiences are also very much visible, present and bodily. Queerness is a lived bodily experience. This is why radical visibility is also needed. Previous chapters examined non-objectifying gaze with mostly non-figurative means. I avoided representing the body because it is so easily categorized. Visibility still remains an essential strategy of queer resistance. Thus it is crucial to ask, how to accomplish non-objectifying gaze in portraits? How can I queer the (process of making a) portrait, and why should I?

The previous strategies that I used were inspired by specific theories such as Halberstam's queer failure or Marks' haptic visuality. The idea for the *Non-binary Self-portraits* derives from lived experiences. It is inspired by discussions about representation, cultural appropriation[18], problematics of the gaze, and photographer/artist's position. What to do with all this

17 Non-binary people are part of the transgender spectrum

18 When someone uses elements from a culture other than their own often without appreciating the original meaning of those elements.

artistic and technical knowledge? How to use it to make a difference?

I am increasingly aware of the privileged position I have as an artist/photographer. I want to approach portraiture in a way that dismantles the power imbalance between the photographer and the(ir) model. The common form 'their' (models) seems to reveal the nature of the relationship. The model is something the photographer owns. (Let's not even go to the term 'shoot'. The photographer shoots their models and captures their image. I cannot roll my eyes hard enough.) How to make portraits and represent people without becoming the so-called owner of those people or their images?

As an artist/photographer, I need to represent the models, here non-binary people, *on their own terms*. I wanted to find a way the models could be active and actively participate in their own representation. I argue that if the model is engaged in the making of the image, it is less likely that the end result has an objectifying gaze. Another method that might achieve non-objectifying gaze in a portrait would be to use the tools of haptic visuality, blurriness, exposure etc. However, I am not sure if that would activate only the resulting image or the viewer but not the model.

Many (non-binary/transgender) photographers have approached this issue of models' self-determination by collaborating with the models. Artists such as S. Conlon, S. Davidmann, J.J. Levine, and L. Philomène photograph non-binary people. Their portraits are made together with the models. They do not strive for a unified series with set rules/visual guidelines. Instead, they create images where the models have agency over their own representation. This is how the photographers describe their process (and motivations),

> "As a trans photographer myself, I want to shift the gaze of cisgender photographers profiting off of trans bodies, and to show trans people having agency over their own identities." (Philomène, 2019b)

> "I always ask my [sic] models extensively about how they want to be presented" (Levine in Davidow, 2016, p. 310)

> "Queer Portraits is a photographic project trying to work through the sticky mess of representation and visibility by making images of queer people as they would like to be seen in the world."
> (Conlon, 2019)

These kinds of projects of collaborative photography are a lot like mine. They seem to follow the same kind of ethical approach where the power of the photographer has been given partly to the model. The model becomes an active participant instead of an object to be photographed. At times Davidmann also gives the camera to the models and is themself being photographed by them (Kilian, 2013, pp. 94–95). This way, they challenge the power structure between themself and the models even further. I also give the camera / remote control to the models, but I do not go in front of the camera. I leave.

METHOD

I set the studio ready for self-portraits. I check that the camera's remote control is working and the lighting is right. There is a large softbox facing straight at me. No backdrop, just the blank white studio wall behind me. *Click!* The photographs appear on the computer screen placed next to the camera. When the model walks in, I hand them the remote control and show how everything works. I ask if they prefer a headshot or a full portrait. I adjust the camera accordingly. I tell them that they can choose what kind of self-portrait they want to make. They can decide if they like to be recognizable or not. I courage them to experiment and to take all the time they need. They can listen to music if they want. I close the curtains. I stay on the outside and leave the model alone. After the photoshoot, they choose the photograph they want me to use. In the end, we sign a contract on the image use (see appendix C). The photographs are named "*Self-portrait of (model's name of choice)*".

This is my attempt to dismantle the power imbalance between the photographer and the model. I seek to represent the models just as they want to be represented without me involving in it. Quite quickly, I

became aware of the impossibility of the task. (Most models were happy with the liberties, but few expressed some concerns of having so much responsibility on the outcome.) I had to make some decisions and thus use my power position as the photographer/artist. The mere fact that I have more knowledge of the photographic/art tradition guided me to make decisions on behalf of the model. These decisions, I imagine, also benefit the model. During the process, I also had to admit that I wanted to have some control over the visuals.

Here are the choices that I made, how I justified them, and what aspects I still find problematic. I am going to be extremely specific because I think all these formal details matter. They are all political even if they sometimes disguise as mere aesthetic choices. In contrary to my previous methods where I embraced the failures of technology, here its "correct" use became the defining element in many ways. It guided the process at times.

The studio as a location

I wanted a location that is neither mine nor the models' even though the Aalto University's photography studio is definitely more familiar to me than to the models. Still, the studio environment enabled a unity both between the photoshoots as situations and the portraits visually. I was able to build the same set-up to all of the photoshoots. The studio also provided me with all the equipment that I needed, the lights, the camera, the computer, the remote control etc.

There is an illusion of neutrality in the studio environment when one builds everything from scratch. The photographic studio is also a rather cold and technical surrounding to be in. The studio isolates the model from the world/surroundings. On the other hand, because of this isolation, the studio may be a safe space for the models to express identity on their own terms (Davidmann, 2013, p. 112).

The lighting

I chose a large softbox that points straight at the model from behind the camera. This way, the model was evenly lit whichever way they decided to position themself in front of the camera. Now there was also more room to move because the whole studio space was lit. More complex lighting

would have limited the model's movements as there would have been only a small section of the studio where the lighting is in balance. I also found it important that the light was flat and imitated daylight to some extent. This way, I was pursuing neutrality. No deep shadows or brilliant highlights. I do, however, realize that all the choices made in the studio environment are decisions (conscious or not) and thus never neutral.

Background

In the (doomed) quest for neutrality, I did not add a backdrop. I used a naked white studio. (So much could be said on why it is especially the whiteness and not any other shade or colour that is considered neutral. White people are the neutral pure beings of light. They are the light of the world[19].) This resulted in backgrounds in different shades of grey depending on the framing the model chose. The closer the model was to the camera, the darker the background. I did not feel the need to unify the shade of the backgrounds in all images. I preferred to leave the camera in place and chose to use two different lenses according to the model's framing wishes.

Framing

Due to technical issues, the model had to choose if they wanted a full-length portrait or something closer to a head and shoulders portrait. They had the opportunity to experiment with both if they wanted to. I chose the most suitable lens: 35mm for full-length portrait and 55mm for a head and shoulders portrait. I adjusted the lighting and the elevation of the camera accordingly. Unfortunately, these technical issues posed some restrictions on how the model could move in the studio and how the image was eventually composed. With exactly the same set-up, it was not possible to take both a full-length portrait and a headshot without the technical qualities of the image suffering greatly. (I did say to the models that I do not mind technical 'faults' like over- or underexposure if they wanted to experiment. None of them did.) The technology of photography is again affecting the images and representation in general.

19 see Dyer, 1997

Model recruiting process

I recruited the models using my personal social media channels on Facebook and Instagram. I hoped that the message would spread a little bit and it fortunately did. 21 people contacted me (see appendix B). I knew only a few of them beforehand. This kind of small scale recruiting process is not the best for reaching a diverse group of people, but I took the risk. I would always be able to continue expanding the series later on.

My position as a student of photography and gender studies attracted people with similar interests, many of them friends of friends from these fields. Also, the fact that I was only able to arrange the photoshoots in the Aalto University's studio in Otaniemi, Espoo had its effect because the models had to travel to Otaniemi to participate. This is why most of the models are from the area (Helsinki/Espoo).

I was looking for non-binary/genderqueer people. I did not reveal my method before they contacted me. They only knew I was making a portrait series for my thesis and that they could be anonymous if they so wished. I felt this was important if some of them were not (entirely) out, for example. Maybe they would not want to be the face/body of non-binary/transgender people in public but still wanted to participate. This option to stay anonymous is in line with the discussions in this thesis about how it should not be mandatory to disclose one's (queer) identity.

Editing & Exhibiting

With permission from the models, I decided to turn the images black and white. I felt that the grey background was making the studio space too prominent in the colour versions. The background got too much weight. The black and white images also create a visually pleasing combination with the other more abstract and colourful works in the series.

All portraits are the same size to communicate equality between the models. Because the images are co-authored, I had to consider the editing choices, and the image sizes even more carefully than usually. I did not want to make drastic changes to the images that the models chose. (What they chose was the untouched version straight from the camera.)

With these choices, I balanced a lot with whether I should make the images more similar together (a consistent group) or if I could further

emphasize their individuality. In my opinion, the formal unity in a portrait series may sometimes work against the individuality of each person pictured. This is why I tried to avoid making a typology that highlights the similarities of these non-binary people. Still, I did not want to make a series that is visually all over the place. I tried to balance between the two.

Authorship

I am not the author of the images unambiguously. I like to think of myself as a co-author. This is collaborative photography. I have made some decisions on the visual aspects and the concept. The models have made many decisions on how they want to perform to the camera. They ultimately pressed the shutter release button on the remote control. In some of the portraits, it is evident that the models have taken the images themselves because the remote control is visible. I also wanted to give proper credit to the models by naming the images "*Self-portrait of (the chosen name of the model)*". This way I feel that I am correctly acknowledging the authorship of the models.

In this text, I refer to them all as 'models'. The term is a bit downgrading if you consider their actual input. Maybe model/photographer would be a more appropriate term.

Agreement on image use

I signed an agreement on image use with each of the models after the photoshoot (see appendix C). This way I wanted to make sure the models knew where their chosen image might end up in the future. I felt that this kind of mutual agreement was also crucial because the photoshoot was a co-operative practice. In the contract, I also agree to remove an image from the series at any time if the model asks for it. I did this for two reasons. Firstly, I understand people's situations or even identities might change over time. Secondly, being openly portrayed as non-binary may expose to all sorts of harassments and anti-transgender hate speech. If this series was to lead to negative consequences, I wanted to give the models some tools to handle that situation. Additionally, the models were able to agree on the use of all the photographs from the photoshoot for further use, but this was optional.

I felt that this agreement was an important tool for communication between the models and me. It made some power positions more visible and easier to articulate. Now that we all have a copy of the contract, we can go back to them if we need clarification on what was agreed upon during the photoshoot.

ON VISIBILITY

A lot is still to be done in terms of queer/transgender rights and representation. There is an increasing amount of transgender discrimination. Transgender people of colour being the most vulnerable, not to mention other intersecting inequalities. The rights of transgender/non-binary people are often neglected even in the feminist and gay rights movements. The discrimination is sometimes very blunt and visible. Sometimes it hides in the structural level, in legislation, healthcare and so on. (Stryker, 2020)

One primary concern at the moment is the growing anti-gender movement which includes trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs). The anti-gender movement denies the existence of (socially constructed) gender as separate from (biological) sex. They argue that all people are cisgender and either men or women (sex = gender = binary). TERFs say that transgender people's rights conflict with the (heavily fought and won) rights of cisgender women. These kinds of groups impose a severe threat to all transgender and gender-nonconforming people because they deny their existence entirely. They want to make them completely invisible. (Johnson, 2016, pp. 346–348; Stryker, 2020)

Even without the overtly hostile anti-gender movements, the visibility and rights of transgender people are not self-evident. The prevailing gender system in most (Western) countries is binary. This is why there are countless ways in which non-binary/transgender people remain invisible – in speech, before the law, in healthcare, in the clothing departments, in the toy sections, in toilet signs, in social security numbers, in passports and so on. In many cases, there officially/legally are only men and women (or males and females). This kind of structural invisibility (and

illegibility) is constantly present in transgender/non-binary people's daily lives. (see, e.g. Alasuutari et al., 2017; Rantala, 2016)

Confrontational visibility is one way to defend transgender existence against the forces that want to deny it and structures that hide it. Images provide proof. We are here, we are queer(/transgender). Visibility is a double-edged sword or as Foucault (1975/1995) said: "visibility is a trap" (p. 200). Transgender visibility in the media increases knowledge about transgender people and their(/our) rights, but it also increases discrimination and prejudices (Stryker, 2019, p.31). It exposes the people who are visible (or out). Visibility benefits surveillance. If someone or something wants to put a target on you, they can. Visibility both empowers and makes vulnerable. Especially when you are a minority.

Despite the dangers of visibility, I argue that it is vital for (queer) people to be seen and to be seen on their own terms. This was something that also came through from the models' comments during the photoshoots. The fact that so many non-binary people wanted to participate is also telling. I want to believe that these kinds of photographic series of queer people not only serve as proof that these people exist. They also create a reality where these people can be seen/visible. They enable imagining ways of being. All identities are not always visible (McRuer, 2006, p. 2), but this is our attempt to make non-binary people visible now and in the future.

However, the question of the visibility of non-binary gender is complicated. How can non-binary people be visible when the frame of representation is (still) built on gender binarism? As long as this is the case, non-binary genders are often destined to be illegible. In this frame, they are a failure. Getsy (2019) states that, "in figurative art, whenever a human body is represented, we rush to classify it—and taxonomies of race, age, ability, gender, class, and appeal are all brought to bear on that image of a person." (p. 67). One reason why I chose to photograph non-binary/genderqueer people was that I want to explore the visibility of gender. I am not only interested in the representation of different genders (e.g. in the media) but the actual visibility of gender (or queerness).

Media representation of non-binary people is often somewhat androgynous. However, not all non-binary bodies are or can be rendered

to look genderless. Not all non-binary people want to adopt that particular look. Many activists have instead questioned the demand to "look non-binary" and the need to erase all gender markers their bodies (or clothing etc.) could have. They are trying to remove the stigma of not being or looking transgender/queer enough (or not being non-normative enough as I discussed in chapter 2).

With this collaborative practice, I wanted to avoid forming new taxonomies. I tried to avoid creating a series/typology that says "this is what non-binary people look like". I feel that giving a lot of liberties to the models achieved this to some extent—the original approach of each model and the choices they made highlight their individuality. I think the images resist the formation of a unified "non-binary look", and this is all thanks to the models' creative approaches.

Instead of reading too much into the portraits, it would be interesting to hear from the models themselves. What was their objective? What did they want to communicate with their chosen frames? Do they think their non-binary gender is somehow visible in these portraits or not? To hear the models' opinions would be a fascinating basis for further research.

A few of the models actually touched on this topic while they were choosing their photographs. One of them said they selected the image where they looked dignified, the other that they aspired to look ordinary because for them being non-binary is normal. I find these comments interesting in relation to Halberstam's theory of queer failure and the non-normative. Does looking ordinary contradict the idea of embracing the failure, or is it precisely what these models are doing? Being non-binary might be strange for someone else, for the "dupes", but for these people themselves it is ordinary and a source of pride.

In my opinion, this collaborative method is queer in content simply because the models are non-binary. It queers the photographic practice because it blurs the role of the photographer and interferes with the power balance between the model and photographer. One could even say that this method is non-binary because the distinction between the two binary positions of the model and the photographer are blurred.

6 . CONCLUSIONS

> "The practice of art involves the cultivation of receptivity to a phenomenon or experience, which brings with it a condition of vulnerability to being changed by it." (Rosiek, 2018, p.640)

What is needed for queer visibility? I believe non-objectifying gaze is key. Illegibility can be a form of resistance, failure a superpower. Readability should not be compulsory. I presented four queer tactics that employ ambiguity and failure. They give space for self-determination and encourage vulnerability.

I set out to ask what is queer art/photography and how to queer art/photography. I cannot give a comprehensive answer, but I presented a few possibilities through varied artistic practices. However, my main focus was not eventually on these questions. Instead, they led me to discussions on the in/visibility of queer identities. What is visible or should be made visible? How can the demand for cultural legibility of queer identities be resisted? These debates were also more or less present in most texts on (contemporary) queer art that I used as references.

The central issue of in/visibility in queer art is tied to the histories of oppressions. The demand for visibility is often closely connected to surveillance and control experienced by queers and other minorities. My chosen queer tactics, such as abstraction or haptic visuality, question the primacy of the visual and move around it. They disrupt the power structures and propose non-visual knowledges that are more sensuous and bodily. They illuminate the unseen. They are the sly resistance.

The centrality of queer identity (in queer art theory) led me to the conclusion that queer art cannot be separated from the political questions of being queer. This is also the main reason why I believe all contemporary art cannot be queer. All artworks can be queered or read against the grain, but in principle, they are not all queer.

There are a multitude of queer (art) tactics. There is no single way of defining queer art. Actually, instead of asking what is queer art, it might be more useful to ask, what do the (queer) artworks do? Are they supporting the norm or queering/defying it? Do the artworks support dominant power structures, or do they strive to dismantle them? Do they offer a queer understanding of the world? Are they for, about, with or of queer people? If queer people are portrayed, how is it done? Is the gaze objectifying or non-objectifying? What does the artwork do to/for its subject as an individual or to/for their community? Do the models somehow benefit from being portrayed or not? Does the queer community benefit from the (works of) art in any way? What are the artworks demanding from their viewer?

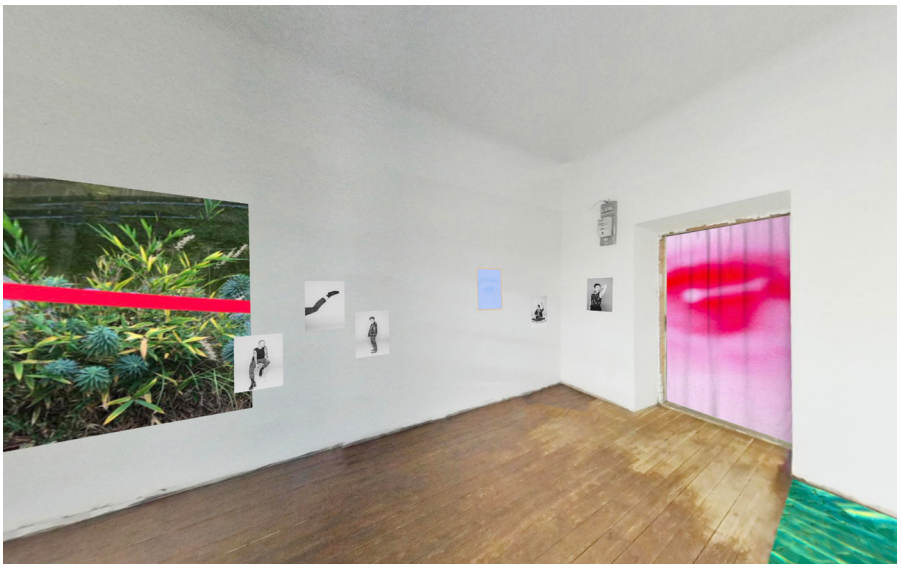
This approach emphasizes the activity qualities of art and the norm-defying properties of queer. It emphasizes art's social role, responsibilities, and the impact it can(/should) have. A work of art is an entity with consequences and it has an active presence. It is communicating with the viewer. It has something to say. This approach also brings forth the responsibilities of the artist, the art community etc. There is an urgency in art.

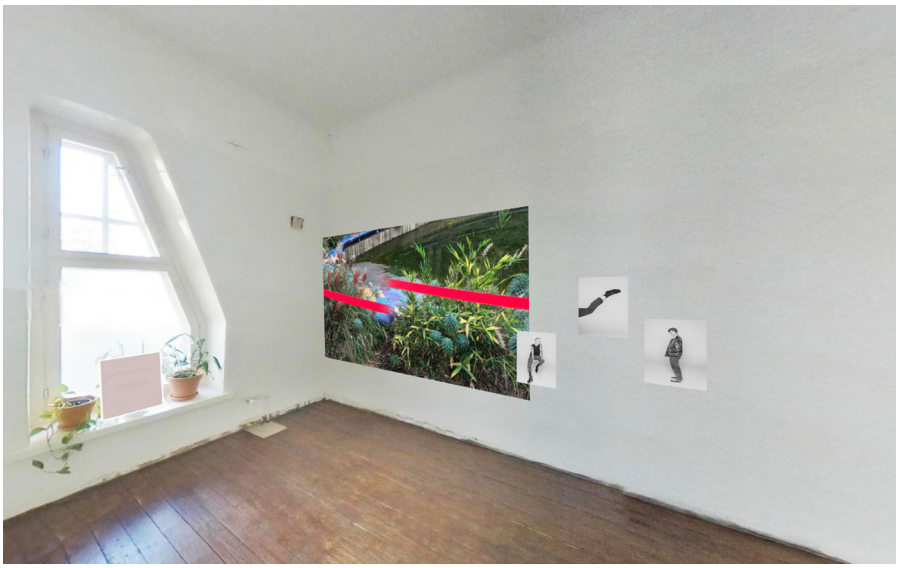
One of art's social purposes is to present utopias (Sevänen, 2018). Queer art can be something that shows queer utopias. It can offer unconventional ways of connecting and being. It can present a world where queer visibility does not have to be confrontational to fight for fundamental human rights, or illegible to avoid persecution.

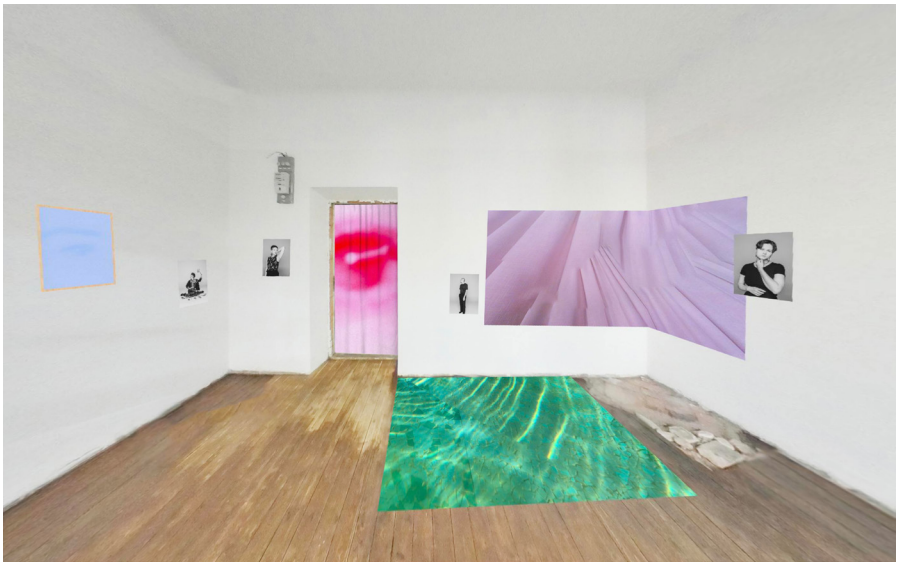
All images of gender rebellion do not have to be slogans. Sometimes they can be poems.

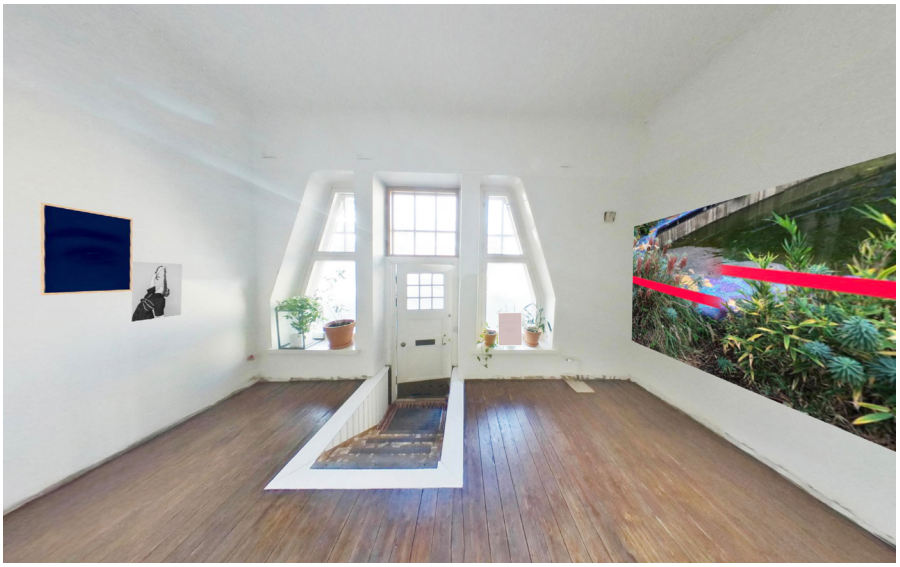
EXHIBITION PLAN

360° Exhibition view at https://kuula.co/share/7JkwJ









Jussi Lautu

IN/VISIBILITY

This is a soft and gentle rebellion. Illegibility can be a form of resistance, failure a superpower.

What is needed for queer visibility? I believe non-objectifying gaze is key. Readability should not be compulsory. Here I present three queer tactics that employ ambiguity and failure. They give space for self-determination and encourage vulnerability.

Non-binary Self-portraits

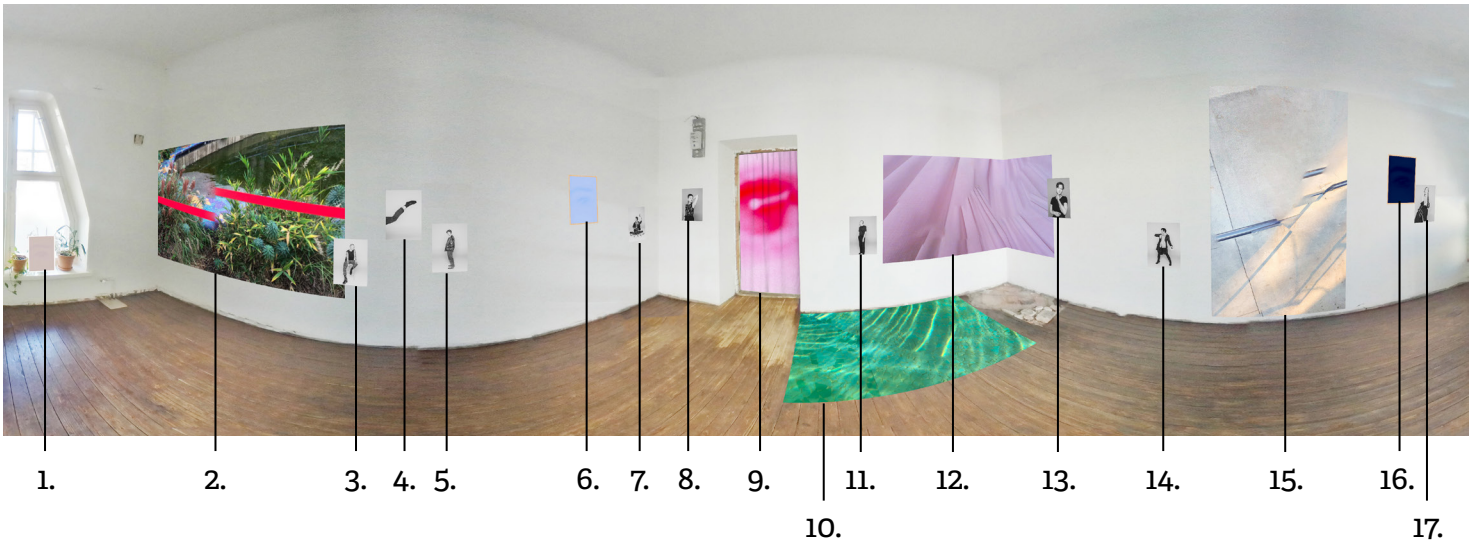
These are self-portraits of non-binary people. This was a collaborative practice where the models had control over their self-representation. These are the portraits the models made and chose for this series.

Eyes touching

I question my faith in exposure. Can images speak to other senses than sight? These photographs are experiments on haptic visuality. They explore the possibilities of incomplete visions as messengers of bodily sensations.

We're glitch, and we're here.

These are the *Lines of Flight* in the landscapes of Google Street View. Failures and glitches reveal possibilities for escape.



1. *Needle in the Eye I* (2020)
   Digital print on matte paper, white wooden frame

2. *Lines of Flight III* (2020)
   Digital print on vinyl

3. *Self-portrait of Aro Valtteri Mielonen* (2020)
   Digital print on matte paper

4. *Self-portrait of Jonne Sippola* (2020)
   Digital print on matte paper

5. *Self-portrait of Frank* (2020)
   Digital print on matte paper

6. *Needle in the Eye III* (2020)
   Digital print on matte paper, birch frame

7. *Self-portrait of Kamos* (2020)
   Digital print on matte paper

8. *Self-portrait of Valo Syksy Elia* (2020)
   Digital print on matte paper

9. *Piercing Eye* (2020)
   Print on velvet fabric

10. *Lines of Flight IV* (2020)
    Digital print on vinyl

11. *Self-portrait of Jussi* (2020)
    Digital print on matte paper

12. *Lines of Flight II* (2020)
    Digital print on vinyl

13. *Self-portrait of Jonna Tuupainen* (2020)
    Digital print on matte paper

14. *Self-portrait of Ruska* (2020)
    Digital print on matte paper

15. *Lines of Flight I* (2020)
    Digital print on vinyl

16. *Needle in the Eye II* (2020)
    Digital print on matte paper, birch frame

17. *Self-portrait of Luna Inkeri* (2020)
    Digital print on matte paper

WAS I TRANSPARENT? — Reflections on the Feminist Research Ethics Manifesto

Gender-neutral language

Finnish has no gendered pronouns, and I assume this was probably easier for me to accomplish than for a native English speaker. I suspect that for the reader the use of initials instead of full first names might not be ideal because it may take more time to identify the reference. I chose APA as my reference system because it allows the use of initials in the reference list.

I wonder if using the singular they pronoun is making the text gender-neutral or actually highlighting the gender at times (especially if the reader knows the reference). The singular they is not yet so widely used, not yet a norm. It may seem strange to some readers. Is this non-normativity exposing the norm (gendered pronouns) and making them more visible?

My position and privileges

I tried to pay special attention to this, especially while making the self-portrait series. (chapter 5)

Intersectional and inclusive research

I do not want to put too much emphasis on the identities of the authors and artists that I refer to. Still, I have to do it to some extent. (This seems

to be a popular theme in this thesis!) I do not know the gender, sexual or other identities of all these people I discuss (with). However, many of them are members of the LGBTQIA community in some respect. Most of them are from the Western academic/art context. I noticed that, due to the limited scope of the thesis, I had to leave out many voices that might have added a more intersectional perspective, and this upsets me.

The fact that I chose to use queer as an umbrella term for all LGBTQIA people also hides differences within and makes the approach less intersectional.

I am open about my decisions, motivations, and failures

These reflections are one attempt at it. What I noticed was that this is quite an impossible task. I am blind to many of my motivations and failures at this point. I cannot be objective in my research or towards my actions. What I can do is to be open about at least that.

I consider the impact of research beyond personal development

This is a tricky one. I cannot predict what impact there will be or if there will be any. I wrote quite a lot about the ethical aspects of minority representation/visibility and the current issues relating to transgender rights. I hope these will raise some awareness on these issues. I also believe that when I have the exhibition, it will address these same issues. I also hope that the manifesto will be useful for someone else as well.

Accessibility

I chose English even though it is not accessible to all in a Finnish University such as Aalto University. I would have faced the same problem with Finnish as my language. I had two main reasons for choosing English. First was the terminology of queer studies that does not translate well into Finnish. Despite multiple efforts, there are no good enough terms for 'queer' or 'queering' in Finnish. In this sense, the settings of my thesis are bound to the English language. This emphasis is, in many ways, a problematic aspect of queer studies in general. It is still very anglocentric. Thus the understanding of queer matters is also unavoidably structured accordingly. They follow the logic of English terminology.

The second reason for choosing English was practical. I am planning to pursue an academic career and apply for a doctoral program at some point. I saw this MA thesis as an opportunity to practice my English writing skills. It becomes useful if I apply to an international doctoral program or wish to join international academic discussions.

I think I managed to avoid academic jargon in most parts. I tried to write fairly uncomplicated text. However, at times I felt that more complexity was needed to express the nuances that did not (or I could not) communicate otherwise. I also provided short explanations to terms that I thought might not be common knowledge.

In the layout, I tried to follow the guidelines for accessible design. I used *The controversy of accessible type* (Chen 2019) as my primary resource. I chose Gill Sans Bold Extra Condensed as my headline font as a reference to the iconic SILENCE=DEATH poster. Silence=Death Project was an AIDS awareness-raising group during the AIDS epidemic. The poster is still used by, for example, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). The font in the body is a slab serif style font for readability. (Though, what I understood was that no one typeface or style is unanimously considered the most accessible.) I would have wanted to use fonts designed by other queer people who would have also paid attention to the accessibility of the typeface. Unfortunately, finding a typeface like that in this timeframe proved to be too demanding.

Care and well-being

This was something that I had to consider especially when the COVID-19 pandemic started. I had to acknowledge that it took a toll on my and everyone else's well-being in the latter part of the thesis process. I needed to take the time to process the changes it had on our lives and my plans with the thesis. The thought of accepting possible failures due to the changing situation was the step that helped me the most.

POSTPONED — The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic of spring 2020

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic took the world by storm at the time of my thesis process in spring 2020. Like for nearly everyone else, it had its effects on my work as well. I was distracted by it for at least the last two months of the process. Still, I did not want it to be the ongoing theme in my main text. This is why I decided on this separate document. Here are some of the things I would have done differently without the pandemic.

21 people contacted me and were interested to participate in the ***Non-binary Self-portraits*** photoshoots. With most of them, I had already made plans and set a date for a photoshoot. Nine of the 21 photoshoots were arranged before the whole Aalto University closed its doors and I was no longer able to use the photography studio. Also, it did not feel ethical to look for alternative ways of completing the photoshoots because social distancing was encouraged by the state. I settled for the nine portraits I had and postponed the rest. This breaks my heart because I was so overwhelmed by the high number of people that contacted me. I wish I will be able to arrange the photoshoots somehow on a later date.

An exhibition was initially planned for April 2020, then moved to May 2020, and eventually postponed indefinitely to a post-virus future. The exhibition was supposed to take place in a small private pop-up artspace called P Art Space Y in Helsinki. It is a living room at my friend's apartment, a former retail space that is now under renovation. Fortunately, I was able to construct a 360° exhibition plan using that same space as my background.

There are also worrying signs that the pandemic may decrease the rights of transgender or all LGBTQIA people in many countries. For example Hungary and The United States use this somewhat chaotic situation to limit transgender and other minority/LGBTQIA rights. (Diamond, 2020; Walker, 2020)

AGREEMENT ON IMAGE USE

My chosen image is: _____
filename/-s

The title of the image will be

Self-portrait of _____
the name you would like to use

The artist (Utu-Tuuli Jussila / Jussi Lautu) has the rights to use and redistribute the chosen image.
They are allowed to use the image as part of their artistic practice (including exhibitions, publications etc.).
The chosen image can be published on the artist's website and social media channels.
The chosen image can be used as a material in Utu-Tuuli Jussila's Master's Thesis in The Aalto University and in possible future research and can be published in connection with them.

The model is allowed to use the image to their personal use (e.g. social media) as long as they state that the image is made in collaboration with Jussi Lautu.
The model may later request that the use of the image be stopped, and the artist then undertakes to remove the image from the series as far as possible at that stage.

☐ In addition, all other photographic material taken during the photoshoot may be used as research material and published in connection with the research.

_____
Date and Place

_____
Utu-Tuuli Jussila (aka Jussi Lautu)

_____
Model's Signature

_____
Clarification of Signature

translated from the Finnish original

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